

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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STEVENSON: W. VA. MINE DISASTER SHOWS NEED FOR CORPORATE MANSLAUGHTER ACT

INDIANAPOLIS – An explosion Monday that trapped 13 people at a West Virginia mine with a long record of safety violations demonstrates the need for worker protections of the type being advocated for passage in the Indiana General Assembly by State Rep. Dan Stevenson (D-Highland).

"From reading news accounts of the disaster taking place at the Sago Mine near Charleston, W. Va., I have noted that this facility has a long and ugly history of being unsafe," Stevenson said. "In 2005 alone, more than 200 safety violations were reported, many of which were considered significant and substantial by federal inspectors. The Sago Mine also has an injury rate nearly three times the national average."

To prevent such prolonged histories of safety violations in Indiana, Stevenson has filed what he has called the Corporate Manslaughter Act, which would toughen penalties against employers who fail to correct unsafe working conditions that help cause deaths and serious bodily injuries.

"My prayers are with the miners who are trapped underground, as well as their families," Stevenson said. "At the same time, I cannot help but be outraged that the state of West Virginia has allowed this mine to operate in such an unsafe manner. Despite a sorry record of safety violations and injuries on the job, the people who own and operate this mine are issuing public statements that they believe the facility is safe."

"This kind of behavior is all too typical of the mentality demonstrated by the people who run their businesses based on a concern for the bottom line, rather than the health and safety of their workers," he continued. "It is that kind of mind set that we hope to stop through the Corporate Manslaughter Act."

Stevenson's legislation would allow criminal charges to be filed against employers or their agents who have done nothing to address safety violations that have been in existence in a workplace, despite repeated warnings from employees or unions. Penalties would range from a Class A misdemeanor for negligence leading to bodily injury to a Class C felony if an employee dies as a result of a knowing or intentional violation of administrative rules.

"We know that such legislation is needed in Indiana, where workplace fatalities increased in 2004," Stevenson said. "The emergency in West Virginia shows that other versions of the Corporate Manslaughter Act are needed throughout the United States. I hope lawmakers in those areas will consider their own proposals to protect the health and safety of workers."

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This news release can be accessed on the Internet at www.IN.gov/H11